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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001858

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SUBJECT: DAS GRAY DISCUSSES IRAN WITH TURKISH MFA OFFICIALS

REF: A. 2005 ANKARA 007098

[1](#)B. ANKARA 001213

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. DAS Gordon Gray visited Ankara on March 22 to discuss USG ideas on the Iranian nuclear program with several senior Turkish MFA officials. DAS Gray delivered a strong message emphasizing that, while Washington has taken no option off the table, the USG remains committed to a diplomatic solution. He also stressed the importance of continued Turkish support for the international consensus on Iran. Turkish officials repeated Turkey,s support for the international consensus encouraging Iran to comply with its international obligations and emphasized their strong preference for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. End Summary.

MFA SUPPORTS DIPLOMATIC PATH ON IRANIAN NUKES

[1](#)2. (C) In DAS Gray's MFA meetings, all the Turkish officials stressed that Turkey will support the international consensus encouraging Iran to comply with its international obligations, and emphasized Turkey,s strong preference for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. MFA Director General for International Security Affairs Tomur Bayar stated that Turkey supports a diplomatic solution and welcomed the USG,s cautious, international approach to Iran. Bayar reaffirmed that Turkey shares the concerns of the US, the UNSC P-5, and the EU-3 regarding Iran, and emphasized that Turkey will continue to support the EU-3 process.

[1](#)3. (C) Director General for Middle East and South Asia Ambassador Bozkurt Aran reminded us that Turkish FM Abdullah Gul told Iranian FM Mottaki that Iran had to work under international obligations and be open and proactive with the IAEA. Aran claimed that Turkey is allying itself with the EU-3 on this issue -- and the broader EU more generally -- since Ankara wants to become an EU member.

[1](#)4. (C) DAS Gray emphasized that Iran,s nuclear ambitions represent a threat to Turkey and the international community and explained the USG,s commitment to the current diplomatic track. He also drew his interlocutors, attention to other USG concerns about Iran, including its support for terrorism in the Palestinian territories and the Persian Gulf, Iran,s harboring of al Qa'ida fugitives, and Tehran,s unhelpful role in Iraq. Moreover, Ahmadi-Nejad,s election has

intensified U.S. concerns about the lack of democracy and human rights in Iran. Gray noted ways the U.S. is seeking to reach out to the Iranian people, including through a USD 75 million budget supplemental to increase broadcasting and cultural exchanges.

BUT WORRIES ABOUT FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS

15. (C) Turkish MFA U/S Ambassador Ahmet Uzumcu described the Iranian nuclear program as both a regional and a global problem. He said that the good news so far is that the international community is united: Iran has failed to turn it into a U.S. versus Iran issue. Uzumcu warned, however, that the Iranians will continue to seek to drive wedges among members of the international community and, in the Turkish view, is prepared to exploit the perception that some EU members are more "flexible" than others. Maintaining a unified approach will be essential and Uzumcu encouraged the U.S. to "use Europe more" to prevent the perception that this issue is a U.S. versus Iran problem.

IRANIAN NUKES NOT A DIRECT THREAT TO TURKEY

16. (C) In all of DAS Gray,s meetings, MFA officials asserted that Ankara does not currently see Iranian nukes as a direct threat to Turkey,s security. Uzumcu stated that Turkey is fully aware that Iran,s possession of nuclear weapons would give Tehran tremendous political influence and would upset regional stability, but the MFA assesses that the Persian Gulf states are Tehran,s regional targets, not Turkey. Aran

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echoed Uzumcu,s point that a nuclear Iran would be a threat to the Persian Gulf states, not Turkey. Aran noted, however, that a nuclear-armed Iran would raise Turkish sensitivities. Bayer similarly asserted that Turkey does not consider a nuclear Iran a threat to Turkey today, but added that it might become one in the future.

INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN WOULD HURT TURKEY

17. (C) U/S Uzumcu recalled Turkey,s heavy losses from Iraq sanctions and said effective sanctions will require much thought. The MFA believes Iran is still susceptible to international pressure and the USG should keep that pressure up through small, incremental steps, without painting itself into a corner. DG Bayer noted that Turkey shares a border, as well as cultural, ethnic and historical ties with Iran and, therefore, has a different vantage point. Iran is an economic partner and the conduit for Turkey,s access to Central Asia. The GOT does not want to see "a bad neighborhood get worse" with a nuclear capability. Bayer noted that Turkey wants to maintain economic cooperation while also letting Iran know that Turkey will not tolerate Iran,s attempts to become a nuclear power. Bayer affirmed the GOT,s desire to be closely involved in the sanctions process. Turkey had suffered economically from the Iraq war, and a war in Iran "would be much worse." Aran noted that there has been a balance of power and a stable border between Turkey and Iran for 366 years.

18. (C) DAS Gray told his interlocutors that the U.S. intention with any future sanctions would be to target the Iranian leadership, not the Iranian people. He acknowledged that this would be a challenge and stated that the U.S. wishes to consult closely with Turkey on how to do this. All of the officials welcomed close U.S.-Turkish consultations regarding the possibility of future, targeted sanctions.

19. (C) Uzumcu reported that MFA experts had considered the nature of Iranian decision-making process and come to the conclusion that the process -- and who in the regime exercises influence -- depends on the issue and is difficult to penetrate. President Ahmadi-Nejad is but one of several influential leadership figures. In the Turkish analysis, Tehran is capable of changing course quickly and unexpectedly as it assesses threats to the regime. Uzumcu also underscored that Tehran's nuclear program enjoys broad popular support in Iran.

110. (C) Aran, who was until January 2006 Turkey's Ambassador to Iran, asserted that the Iranian regime is not like the Communist Eastern Bloc or post-Soviet countries and cannot be easily subverted from within. He claimed that Iranians are content with their lives: they have food, a roof over their heads, free medical care, education, and government-subsidized gasoline. Aran warned that if the Iranian regime believes it is under threat, it can be very brutal, perhaps more brutal than Americans or Turks can imagine. The limited freedom given to its people, moreover, can be snapped back very quickly.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RHETORIC

111. (C) Bayar and Aran both recounted the GOT's recent bilateral contacts with President Ahmadi-Nejad, FM Mottaki, and Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee Chair Boroujerdi (reftels), during which they reiterated that Turkey had delivered tough messages in private. DAS Gray underscored the importance of matching tough private messages with strong messages in public. Deputy Director General for Arms Control and Disarmament Bulent Meric and Uzumcu both replied that Turkey's messages on the nuclear issue had gotten stronger, but Uzumcu admitted that Turkey's overall public approach would be cautious and "passive." Aran claimed that Ankara was blunt in its private meetings with Iran, but admitted that Turkey's public messages were often softer than its private messages. He said Turkey does not wish to undermine

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growing tourism and economic ties with Iran and does not wish to be seen as meddling in internal Iranian politics. Aran claimed that there were no misunderstandings caused by Turkey's softer private messages. Gray pushed back, saying that he hoped Turkey's strong private messages to Tehran would not be undercut by its weaker public statements.

POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE

112. (C) DAS Gray's visit to Ankara and meetings with senior Turkish MFA officials generated positive press coverage. In a brief press availability outside the MFA building, Gray emphasized that the USG is pursuing a diplomatic path and is appreciative of Turkish support for the international consensus encouraging Iran to comply with its international obligations under the NPT. He also noted that the current crisis is between Iran and the international community, not Iran and the U.S.

113. (U) DAS Gray cleared this cable.

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